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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the extent to which home background and school climate affects ninth grade students' social and political understanding and participation. Using the data from the student questionnaires (n=3106) of the 1999 Civic Education survey, a study was conducted in Cyprus to examine ninth graders' participation in social actions. The objective was to design a model, using two exogenous constructs, the home environment and school climate, and three endogenous constructs, political interest of the student, political environment of the student, and democratic values and social participation of student in social actions. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling methodology (LISREL). The study demonstrated that political interest and school climate influence political interest and political environment. These endogenous factors influence democratic values of the students and democratic values influence social participation of students in social actions. (Contains 24 references, 2 figures, and 2 tables.) (Author/BT)

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# The Effects of Background Variables on the Participation of Students in Social Actions

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**The Effects of Background Variables on the Participation of Students in Social Actions**

This article proposes a model of home environment and school climate on the participation of ninth graders based on 1999 CIVIC Education data of students in social actions. This study examined ninth graders' participation in social actions by means of a questionnaire; the data were analyzed using structural equation modeling methodology (LISREL). The objective was to design a model, using two exogenous constructs —the home environment and school climate— and three endogenous constructs —political interest of the student, political environment of the student, democratic values and social participation of student in social actions. The study demonstrated that political interest and school climate influence political interest and political environment and these endogenous factors influence democratic values of the students. Finally democratic values influence social participation of student in social actions.

The Civic Education Study is one of the studies that was undertaken under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. Over 93 thousands students from 28 countries around the world participated in this study. The population includes all students enrolled on a full time basis in that grade in which most students aged 14:00 to 14:11 are found at the time of testing (Torney-Purta, et al, 2001)

A student's home environment can be seen as an agency that aids in the construction of student political interest and political environment. School is another significant factor determining how students learn the different subjects in school, in this case civic education.

There is an extensive bibliography advocating that social and home background affects students' performance, especially because schooling and curriculum are biased in favour of middle-class child (Young, 1971; Young & Whitty 1977; Apple, 1991, 1993). In this context, it has been argued that performance is a social product and that social cultural diversity is interpreted and evaluated as students' deficiency, mainly because knowledge and the curriculum are related to the interests of particular classes and professional groups. Other views (e.g. Parsons, 1961, 1971) deny the competition of interests and promote the idea of a central culture - instead of a class-culture - that through schooling must be met by all students who have their opportunity to improve their status. From that point of view it has been argued, that schooling can reduce home and social inequalities

instead of reproducing them. Additionally Giroux (1981, 1983) stresses the voluntaristic nature of resistance theory and the importance of self-determination in the education system, which prevent direct reproduction. Other interpretive, interactive and phenomenological attempts to understand schooling and students inequalities stress the role of teachers in coping with students' differences (e.g. Wexler, 1987; Pinar & Reynolds, 1992). All the above discourse is grounded on the fact that social and school factors affect performance (Blackledge, & Hunt, 1985). The question that arises concerns the extent to which home background and school climate affect students' social and political understanding and participation.

Citizenship can be defined as participation in the civic, political and social institutions of modern society (Marshall, 1963, 1997). Citizenship is also considered as a set of provisions to counter-act the negative consequences of class or social inequality (Turner, 1993). According to the results of this study it is obvious that a vicious circle is created when home background and school climate may prevent social participation, which is one of the most important elements of active citizenship. In that case, citizenship remains a theoretical system of rights and obligations that cannot counter-act the negative consequences of home-social inequality. A further problem arises from the fact that, while human rights are universal in the sense that they belong to all, rather than to members of any particular nation, race, social class, human beings are not identical and consequently they don't have the same opportunity for participation. In that sense, citizenship has a subjective component: Willingness to act. Legal Possession of rights does not in itself ensure that individuals will feel themselves to be citizens of the country. As Heywood (1994: 156) put it: «Members of groups that feel alienated from their state, perhaps because of social disadvantage or social discrimination, cannot properly be thought of as 'full citizens'».

**Data source**

This study is based on data from the student questionnaires which, in Cyprus, were collected in 1999. All 61 gymnasia (the secondary junior schools) participated in this project each school selecting two classes of 9th graders. Altogether, 3106 students participated in the study (about 30% of the entire population). The subset of students used in this research project was obtained as follows. Of the 3106 students only those who had completed the entire students' questionnaire

were eligible. A subset of variables was chosen from the student questionnaire, so that any missing data or multiple responses led to further student deletion from the data set. This led to a final sample of N=1788.

The two questions that reduced the number of students from 3106 to 1788 are: " Teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions " and " An adult who is good citizen would be willing to ignore (disregard) a law that violated human rights ". In total 4.2 percent and 12.6 of Cypriot students gave the answer "I do not know" in the first question and the second question respectively.

**Student indicators**

Twenty-nine variables on the questionnaire were relevant to this study and were grouped into home background, school climate, democratic values, social participation, political interest, and home political environment factors. The scales of the variables used to define the conceptual areas are now briefly described:

The observed variables b1= How far to school did your mother go? b2= How far to school did your father go? (1=did not finish elementary school, 2=finished elementary school, 3=finished some high school, 4=finished high school, 5=some vocational/technical education after high school, 6= some community college, college , or university courses, 7=completed a bachelor's degree at a college or university) b3= About how many books are there in your home? (1=none, 2=1-10, 3=11-50, 4=51-100, 5=101-200, 6=more than 200) b4= Do you get a daily newspaper at home? (1=no, 2=yes) b5= How many years of further education do you expect to complete after this year? ( 1=0 years, 2=1 or 2 years, 3=3 or 4 years, 4=5 or 6 years, 5=7 or 8 years, 6=9 or 10 years, 7=more than 10 years) are assumed to be indicators of factor F1=Educational background of the family.

The observed variables c1= Students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class; c2=Students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues; c3=Teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them during class; c4= Students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of

the other students; c5= Teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often) are assumed to be indicators of factor F2=Class-school climate.

The variables d1= When everyone has the right to express their opinions freely; d2= When newspapers are free of all government control; d3= When private business have no restrictions from government; d4= When people demand their political and social right; d5= When citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely (1=very bad for democracy, 2=somewhat bad for democracy, 3=somewhat good for democracy, 4=very good for democracy) are the indicators of factor F3=Democratic values.

The variables "Good citizen is the one who..." s1= participates in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust; s2= participates in activities to benefit people in their community (society); s3=takes part in activities promoting human rights; s4= takes part in activities to protect the environment; s5=has the will to ignore (disregard) a law that violates human rights; (1=not important, 2=somewhat unimportant, 3= somewhat important, 4=very important) s6= helps voluntarily poor or elderly people in the community; s7=collects money for a social cause; s8= collects signatures for a petition; s8= participates in a non-violent (peaceful) protest march or rally (1= I will certainly not do this, 2=I will probably not do this, 3= I will probably do this, 4=I will certainly do this) refer to factor F4 which indicates social participation.

The variables " The frequency of." i1= reading articles(stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in my country; i2= reading articles(stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in other countries; i3= listening to news broadcasts on the radio (1=never, 2= rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often) refer to factor F5= which is named political interest.

Table 1: Latent variables, Items, Means, s.d and N

| Latent variables | Questionnaire items | X | s.d. | N | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | b1. How far to school did your mother go? | | 3.90 | 1.67 | 3001 |
| F1 | b2. How far to school did your father go? | | 4.07 | 1.75 | 2985 |
| Educational | b3. About how many books are there in your home? | | 4.01 | 1.19 | 3097 |
| Background | b4. Do you get a daily newspaper at home? | | 1.49 | 0.50 | 3089 |
| | b5. How many years of further education do you expect to complete after this year? | | 4.16 | 1.19 | 3087 |
| | c1. Students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class. | 3.03 | 0.93 | 2976 | |
| F2 | c2. Students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues | | 3.43 | 0.75 | 3034 |
| Class-school | c3. Teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them during class. | | 3.14 | 0.93 | 2996 |
| Climate | c4. Students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students. | 3.33 | 0.78 | 2975 | |
| | c5. Teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions. | 2.70 | 0.96 | 2889 | |
| | d1. When everyone has the right to express their opinions freely. | | 3.75 | 0.64 | 3079 |
| F3 | d2. When newspapers are free of all government control | | 2.49 | 0.96 | 2857 |
| Democratic | d3. When private business have no restrictions from government. | | 2.03 | 0.81 | 2840 |
| values | d4. When people demand their political and social right | | 3.50 | 0.89 | 3005 |
| | d5. When citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely | | 3.68 | 0.73 | 3046 |
| | **Good citizen is the one who...** | | | | |
| | s1. participates in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust. | | 3.27 | 0.81 | 2975 |
| | s2. participates in activities to benefit people in their community (society). | | 3.44 | 0.68 | 3065 |
| | s3. takes part in activities promoting human rights. | | 3.61 | 0.64 | 3046 |
| F4 | s4. takes part in activities to protect the environment. | | 3.16 | 0.88 | 3051 |
| Social | s5. has the will to ignore (disregard) a law that violates human rights. | | 2.74 | 1.17 | 2693 |
| participation | s6. helps voluntarily poor or elderly people in the community | | 3.11 | 0.69 | 2998 |
| | s7. collects money for a social cause. | | 3.05 | 0.72 | 2952 |
| | s8. collects signatures for a petition; | | 2.70 | 0.81 | 2884 |
| | s9. participates in a non-violent (peaceful) protest march or rally | | 3.22 | 0.76 | 2693 |
| | **The frequency of...** | | | | |
| | i1. reading articles(stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in my country. | 2.94 | 0.96 | 3060 | |
| F5 | i2. reading articles(stories) in the newspaper about what is | | | | |
| Political | happening in other countries | | 2.83 | 0.94 | 3051 |
| interest | i3. listening to news broadcasts on the radio | | 2.61 | 0.97 | 3053 |
| | e1. The discussions with parents or other adult family members | | | | |
| F6 | of what happening in the county politics. | | 2.98 | 0.93 | 3052 |
| Political | e2. The discussions with parents or other adult family members of | | | | |
| environment | of what happening in international | | 2.91 | 0.94 | 3052 |

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Finally 2 variables, the e1= The discussions with parents or other adult family members of what happening in the county politics; e2= The discussions with parents or other adult family members of what happening in international politics (1= never, 2= rarely, 3= sometimes, 4=often) of factor F6 are related to home political environment.

Incorporating accepted research, and based on the assumed latent variables, a hypothetical initial factor model is presented in Figure 1.

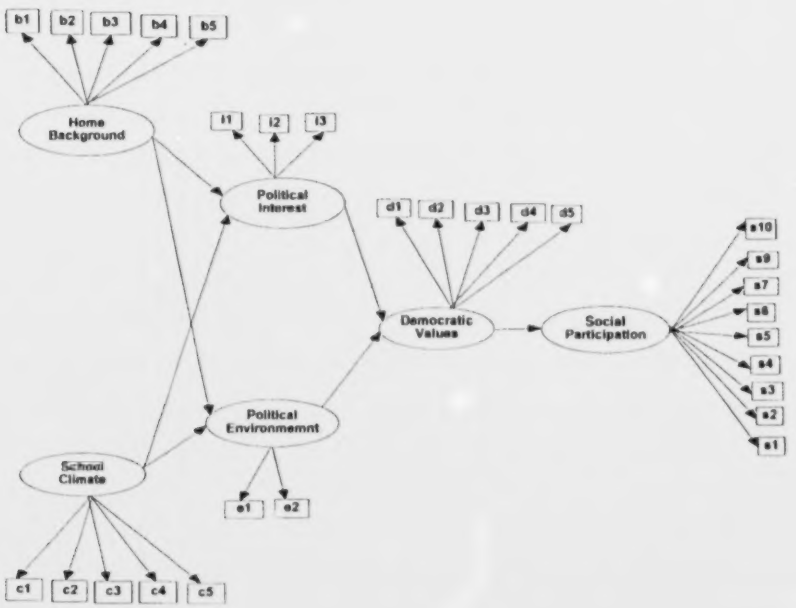


Figure 1: Hypothetical initial model

**Model**

The hypothetical structural model portrayed in Figure 1 indicates that two exogenous latent variables, the home background, which includes parents education and number of books at home, was included since it was hypothesized that parents with more schooling would place a higher value on political values and as a consequence, they would have a positive effect on their children's democratic values and social participation, and school climate is also a factor that was hypothesized to influence political values and in consequence democratic values. Two


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endogenous factors that were hypothesized to influence democratic values are political interest and home political environment. Finally democratic values is supposed to influence directly social participation. The better the democratic values, the better the social participation of student in social actions.

While structural equation modeling supposes that cross-product covariances or Pearson correlations have been derived from variables that are continuous and measured on an interval scale, this is rarely the case for survey data (Coenders et al., 1997). Data collected through questionnaires or interviews are usually based on ordinal observed variables, i.e., the responses are classified into different ordered categories although they are conceptually continuous. An ordinal variable $z_i$ may be regarded as a measurement of an underlying unobserved continuous variable $z_i^*$, and therefore $z_i$ would be related to $z_i^*$ through the step-function:

$z_i = m$ when $\tau_{i,m-1} < z_i^* <= \tau_{i,m}$

for $m = 1, \ldots, n_i$, where $\tau_{i,0} = -\infty$, $\tau_{i,m} < \tau_{i,m+1}$, $\tau_{i,mi} = \infty$.

The parameters $\tau i,1, \ldots \tau i,ni-1$ are called thresholds of the ith variable. This method appears most suitable for the social sciences (Coenders et al., 1997), where many variables are conceptually continuous and measurement instruments may be discrete and have only ordinal properties. In this study all variables were ordinal.

Throughout the process of building the model, all latent variables, which had been assumed as valid, proved to fit. Table 2 presents the factors, the items that were used in this study, the weighting least squares unstandardized LISREL estimates, the standard errors and the corresponding t values, which show that all lambdas-X and lambdas-Y are statistically significant.

**TABLE 2**

**Lisrel estimates (Weighted Least Squares)**

| Factors/Items | lambda-X | s.e | t | Items | lambda-Y | s.e | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Educational Background** | | | | **Democratic Values** | | | |
| b1 (mother) | 1.00 | ---- | ---- | d1 (opinions) | 0.60 | .06 | 10.08 |
| b2 (father) | 0.96 | .04 | 24.76 | d2 (news-control) | 0.43 | .05 | 8.44 |
| b3 (books) | 0.48 | .03 | 16.41 | d3 (restrictions) | 0.10 | .05 | 2.22 |
| b4 (newspaper) | 0.52 | .03 | 15.39 | d4 (rights) | 0.59 | .06 | 10.48 |
| b5 (further-ed) | 0.53 | .03 | 19.29 | d5 (elections) | 1.00 | ---- | ---- |
| **Class Climate** | | | | **Social Participation** | | | |
| c1 (disagree) | 0.95 | .05 | 18.11 | s1 (protest) | 0.68 | .03 | 20.55 |
| c2 (encouraged) | 1.00 | ---- | ---- | s2 (benefit) | 0.91 | .03 | 28.51 |
| c3 (respect) | 0.77 | .04 | 17.43 | s3 (promoting H.R) | 0.95 | .03 | 28.63 |
| c4 (express) | 0.87 | .05 | 18.24 | s4 (prodect-envir.) | 0.71 | .03 | 23.12 |
| c5 (discuss) | o.86 | .05 | 18.30 | s5 (ignore) | 0.13 | .03 | 4.06 |
| | | | | s6 (voluntarily) | 0.88 | .03 | 29.50 |
| | | | | s7 (collects money) | 1.00 | ---- | ---- |
| | | | | s8 (petition) | 0.71 | .03 | 23.34 |
| | | | | s9 (peaceful) | 0.75 | .03 | 24.77 |
| | | | | **Political Interest** | | | |
| | | | | i1 (nat-articles) | 1.00 | ---- | ---- |
| | | | | i2 (int-articles) | 0.96 | .03 | 29.50 |
| | | | | i3 (radio) | 0.35 | .03 | 13.82 |
| | | | | **Political Environment** | | | |
| | | | | e1 (nat-politics) | 0.96 | .05 | 2047 |
| | | | | e2 (int-politics) | 1.00 | ---- | ---- |

Figure 2 present the path model–the unstandardized solution, based on the Cyprus data. In this model class-school climate has very strong direct effects on home political environment and student political interest. As Figure 2 shows, the paths from class-school climate to home political environment (0.54, (0.04), t=12.47), and student political interest (0.68, (0.05), t=13.79) were significant. The paths from home background to political environment (0.24, (0.03), t=8.54), and

to student political interest (0.29, (0.03), t=10.35) were also significant. The effects from political environment (0.21, (0.03), t=8.15), and to student political interest (0.30, (0.03), t=10.94) to democratic values were also significant.

Finally the path from democratic values to social participation (0.74, (0.06), t=12.18) was statistical significant, which means that democratic values is a very strong indicator for social participation.

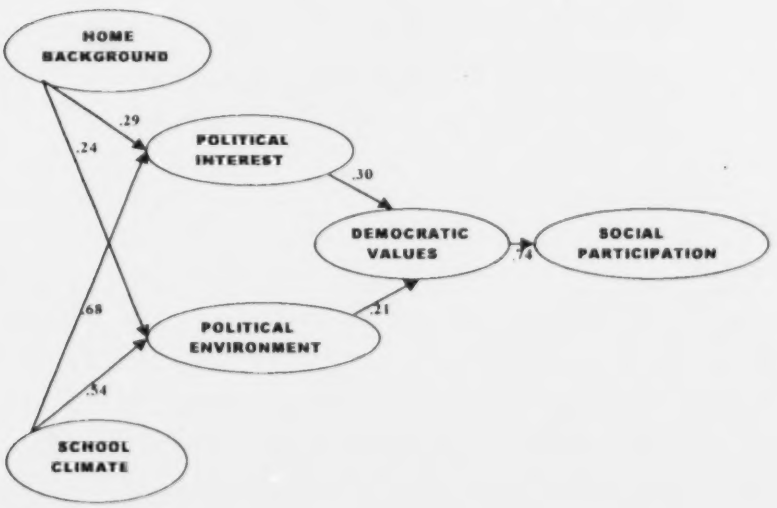


FIGURE 2. Model of social participation process

**Fit statistics**

A variety of fit statistics were applied to assess the "goodness of fit" of the model. Measures of fit included chi-square=2034.53 (df=369, p=0.0), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI=0.97), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI=0.96), comparative fit index (CFI=0.95) and the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA=0.050). The three fit indexes GFI and AGFI and CFI with values above 0.9 (in general) represent reasonable fit (Broome et al., 1997). The CFI is the least affected by sample size (Hu & Bentler, 1995), and the RMSEA index, with its value less than 0.05, reflects a close fit. Browne and Cudeck (1993) believe that RMSEA values between 0.0 and 0.05 indicate a

close fit, less than 0.08 reflect reasonable fit, and greater than 0.08 reflect poor fit. All remaining goodness of fit indices also demonstrated an acceptable fit.

The chi-square is not significant (p=.00) indicating that the data do not fit the model well. It is well known that the chi-square is sensitive to sample size and when the sample size increases the chi-square test has the tendency to indicate a significant probability level, even with trivial differences between the original population matrix and the matrix produced by the model. Recalling that the number of cases were 1788 and according to Marcoulides and Hershberger (1997) the fit of a model should be independent of the size of the sample used to test it. All other indices support the hypothesis that the models fit the sample data in the three countries.

**Discussion**

The present study explored how social participation is stimulated by predictors related to family and school. For initial analyses we decided to use only the student questionnaire data, although the teacher and school questionnaire data could prove informative for subsequent research. For this study we began by posing a simple question: How can we best explain student social participation, based on the IEA CIVIC data, in relation to home background, school-class climate, political environment, political interest and democratic values? To answer this, we chose to elaborate on a model comparing various background factors (home background, mother's and father's education, number of books at home, whether they get at home daily newspaper) and the class climate during teaching in terms of their effect on student social participation. It has been identified that an important element in values education is the school/class "ethos" (Halstead & Taylor, 2000), which indicates among others the nature of relationships, the dominant forms of social interaction , the way that conflicts are resolved, patterns of communication and pupils' involvement, discipline procedures, anti-racist policies, management styles.

The model (see in Figure 2) seems to indicate that the strongest direct influence is democratic values on social participation. Another strong effect was exerted by the school climate on political environment and political interest. Between the political interest and the political environment, the strongest one on democratic values is political interest.

The results of this study indicated that two exogenous factors — school-class climate and home background — define a second-order factor structure which includes three endogenous predictors, democratic values, political interest, and political environment. These results indicate that the problem of social participation is multidimensional in nature. It would be of interesting to see if the model can be applied to other countries with varying degrees of students social participation, of varying levels of achievement on students civic knowledge. Poland for example was the country with the highest achievement, Denmark was the country with average achievement and Colombia the country with the lowest achievement. Fitting the model to these countries, and comparing results with Cyprus may prove insightful.

Democratic values were found to be a very strong predictor of social participation, and because democratic values can be taught, could become important educational objectives. The findings of this study indicate that more research should be undertaken to examine the influence of home background, class-school climate, political interest, political environment and democratic values not only with indirect effects but with direct effects as well. As with any modeling approach, cross-validation and replication are required (Bollen, 1989). The findings of this study are based on a single sample, however generalization of the model would provide considerable support in the modeling of social participation process. Further investigation into the role of social participation, as well as into the compatibility of the present model with other models for different countries could be explored. Finally, the elements of the present model may provide empirical measures for a broad conceptualization of social participation in the developmental model.

This study revealed that home background and school climate affect the political environment within students, acquire democratic values and the willingness of participation. Thus, home background and school climate become obstacles that stand in the way of personal development and self-realization.

These results have important implications in schooling and teaching. It can be argued that effective citizenship can be increased by the acknowledgement of students' differences in cultural, social and family capital, differences that cannot be met through an undifferentiated curriculum and instruction and without any extra-curricular opportunities for participation. Differentiated

citizenship is a means for real universal citizenship. As Young (1997: 257) put it: « 'Differentiated citizenship' as the best way of realizing the inclusion and participation of everyone in full citizenship». Otherwise the notion of global citizenship remains utopian.

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